
FAIR • ELECTIONS • LEGAL • NETWORK

May 5, 2010

Charles Schumer, Chairman
Robert Bennett, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Rules and Administration
305 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: The Universal Right to Vote by Mail Act

Dear Chairman Schumer, Ranking Member Bennett, and members of the Committee:

The Fair Elections Legal Network (FELN) is a national, nonpartisan network of experienced election lawyers involved in removing impediments to increased voter participation by traditionally under-represented constituencies. We write today in support of the Universal Right to Vote by Mail Act. We strongly support the Act because it removes an unreasonable voting impediment that exists in 21 states – requiring citizens to provide an excuse to vote absentee.


In our view, voters in the different states should be given equal opportunities in methods and abilities to cast their ballots in federal elections. Early voting by mail is becoming more and more common across the states. It provides opportunity to voters who may or may not fit within the somewhat arbitrary list of reasons required in “excuse-only” states, and yet may find it extremely challenging to vote in person on Election Day. It allows voters greater deliberation time in considering ballots. Persons with language challenges are able to receive in-person assistance rather than having to bring a second person to the polls. Early voting by mail also helps in-person voters and election officials by reducing the stresses that occur at polling locations on Election Day. It leads to a more accurate count.

The legislation also increases fairness among sectors of the electorate. In “excuse-only” states, absentee balloting is very heavily skewed toward older voters. That imbalance is less pronounced in non-excuse states, and will likely trend toward further balancing as all segments of the electorate become used to the procedures for early voting by mail.

This bill does not mandate a vote-by-mail system, and FELN supports continued in-person voting. It simply eliminates the obstacle that “excuse-only” absentee voting places between citizens and the right to exercise their franchise. As a nation, we need to continue to remove impediments to voting wherever possible. We urge its passage.

Sincerely,


Robert M. Brandon
President


Brian J. Siebel
Legal Director